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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAKAR 002012

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2016

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SUBJECT: CASAMANCE: THE 2004 TRUCE HAS ENDED

REF: DAKAR 1932 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Janice L. Jacobs for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) The December 30, 2004 truce that many Senegalese hoped would mark the end of a two-decade conflict has ended. Arguing that Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC) factional fighting has created a situation in which the Senegalese Armed Forces (SAF) must intervene to re-establish order and sovereignty, as well as assure that seasonal goods reach markets, the SAF has re-established a sizeable presence in the northern Casamance along the Gambian border and has begun an assault on the MFDC's Atika faction. An American citizen with considerable knowledge of the Casamance reported that the SAF has tanks and other heavy equipment in Sindic for the assault on Salif Sadio and his estimated 180 followers. Embassy Banjul's contacts report that fighting and shelling have reportedly caused 2,500 people to seek refuge in The Gambia within the last few days.

¶2. (C) When the Ambassador saw Prime Minister Macky Sall on August 21, he reported that Casamancais had asked the SAF to intervene to end the fighting between MFDC factions. He insisted that the Government remains committed to a peaceful solution to the conflict but that Abbe Diamacoune no longer controls the various rebel groups. The Prime Minister characterized the situation as "very complicated" and offered that the Government continues to provide food and medicine to the rebels.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: In spite of the Prime Minister's comments, the GOS strategy appears to be to force Sadio to the bargaining table. For this operation to be successful, The Gambia must allow other MFDC fighters to prevent Sadio and his men from also seeking refuge in The Gambia. Second, the SAF and GOS must not underestimate Sadio as Bissau-Guinean Chief of Defense Forces (CHOD) Major General Batista Tagme Na Waie did in March. Tagme reportedly visited Dakar within the last two weeks to exchange information about Sadio's strengths and vulnerabilities. By many accounts, however, Sadio still has heavy weapons and landmines at his disposal, as well as access to the sea -- and perhaps to The Gambia -- for resupply and/or escape. He also has fierce, extremely disciplined followers. Sadio may have one other advantage -- the weather. Heavy rains in the Casamance at this time of year can slow down the SAF's heavy equipment; at the same time, the weather can also limit Sadio's ability to move his equipment.

¶4. (C) Why the GOS has really chosen to move against Sadio at this juncture is unclear. Intra-MFDC squabbling has prevented a second round of peace talks for over a year.

However, it will be extremely difficult for the GOS to pretend that this operation constitutes anything less than a renunciation of the 2004 truce. Some speculate that President Wade's European vacation played some role in the timing; if the operation fails, Wade can disavow it. Embassy continues to believe that the only solution to the Casamance conflict is a negotiated one, and we are spreading that message. We e-mailed suggested press guidance to AF/PDPA and AF/W on August 18. END COMMENT.

JACOBS